

Cultivating Collaborative School-Community Development in the 21st Century: The Challenges to Improve Educational Quality in Indonesia

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Abstract. School has a significant role in community development. The school-community linkage must take into account the 21st century needs of students. Consistent with the demands of the 21st century, the goals of academic and community improvements are to reinforce mutual priorities in cultivating collaborative school-community development. This article highlights the challenges to improve educational qualities in Indonesia by reviewing relevant literature on quality education. It is argued that a school council comprising principal, teachers, parents and fellows of community is a typical instrument to promote community participation in education. One prominent method of improving educational quality is by strengthening community participation in the educational process. However, the conventional view sees the role of the school council as commonly to do fundraise from parents and fellows of the community. Hence, this article proposes to broaden the roles of community to support and advise school principals and teachers and to improve parental involvement and community participation in school activities.

Keywords: *community development, educational quality, 21st century needs, collaborative school-community, parental involvement, community participation*

INTRODUCTION

Many countries are racing to improve educational quality through community participation [1]. Developing countries, especially, have created educational institutions to coordinate school-community linkage [2]. Indonesia, in particular, has established committees and parent-teacher associations. Even though the expectation of improving the learning outcome is still far away, investing in these government-sponsored institutions is considered significant [3].

Previous literature on community participation shed lights on why some programs work, and some do not. A study on Health Unit Management

Committees (HUMC) in Uganda, for instance, revealed that community participation improved health care delivery [4]. On the other hand, a study on Village Education Committees (VEC) in India showed that community participation did not improve school quality [5]. The findings of these studies might be influenced by the political power of the respected countries. According to a survey on community participation in these two countries, HUMC is politically more powerful than VEC hence the community participation works [6].

In a study about improving educational quality through enhancing community participation in Indonesia, it is argued that like VEC in India, the school committee in Indonesia has no bargaining power [1]. It means that community participation has little impacts on learning due to political power. For that reason, it is suggested to foster linkages and ties or a good relationship between the school committees and local authorities in planning activities that could improve the learning outcomes at school.

Different countries have different problems and challenges in improving the quality of education. Thus, the main objective of this article is to highlight the challenges to improve educational quality in Indonesia. In doing so, the relevant literature on quality education is reviewed. The outcomes are expected to add a contribution to the literature related to education quality and community participation in many ways and forms. In addition, this article will broaden the literature on education and public service delivery in developing countries.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative descriptive analysis. Qualitative and descriptive research methods are commonly used in conducting social sciences research, including psychology and education. Qualitative and descriptive research is well suited to the study of collaborative school-community development, in which conducting experimental research in this field is hardly possible. Even though the experimental research can be conducted in such setting, the findings of the research are still questionable for its

generalizability [7].

Relevant literature on community engagement through school committees are critically reviewed. In the current article, the authors highlight community roles in improving school performance and development. In addition, the linkage between school and community is discussed in lights of school well being and community-building efforts that seriously take into account the 21st century needs of students. Specifically, the challenges to improve educational qualities in Indonesia are highlighted.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Education Quality in Indonesia

The Indonesian Ministry of National Education regulated a decree No. 044/U/2002 on April 2, 2002 to promote education quality in Indonesia. This decree gives school committees a more significant role in supporting school management and provides a platform for community engagement in education. It replaces the previous school committee organization (*Badan Pembantu Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan – BP3*) which has a primary function to raise funds to support school activities. However, the new school committees can make recommendations for school expenditures, school facilities, and even teacher qualifications. Under the new decree, the role of school committees would go further in facilitating and mediating the relationship between school and community to promote active involvement in the school activities [1].

Unfortunately, this so-called new school committee is somehow still operating like the BP3 model. Even after several years under the new decree, there is little improvement in the collaboration of school and community and student outcomes [8]. As a proof, in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009, Indonesia ranked 57th out of 65 countries in reading [9]. While in the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), only half of the Indonesian students performed above the lowest international benchmark in mathematics [10]. A study of grade nine Indonesian students cohort also found that slightly less than 30 per cent of them had achieved full literacy [11].

There are many factors contributing to the failure of school committees. The most common issues are lack of knowledge and its implement in practice [1]. For that reason, the Government provides a two-day district-level training that must be attended by four school committee members. They include the principal, teacher, parent, and one village representative. The training covers the topics of planning, budgeting, and steps to support education quality. The approach used in the training focus on Creating Learning Communities for

Children (CLCC) model developed by UNICEF. This approach stresses the aspects of active learning, school-based management, and community participation. However, the training could not be fully implemented to all schools due to limited budget and personnel.

Another reason for the failure of the school committees is lack of representativeness. The school management has often handpicked the members of school committees, in which most of the time did not represent parents and the community. A more democratic order should be developed to act in the best interests of parents and community members [12]. Ideally, the school committees should comprise of six parents, three community members, one teacher, one principal, and the head of the village council.

The 2002 decree stipulates at least nine members of school committees. They include community representatives, teachers, parents, and the principal. In the election process, the community is the one who proposes the candidates, and the principal has no right to be the head of school committees. This election process is modelled after the World Bank/Government of Indonesia Urban Poverty Project (UPP). However, the process is not always smoothly run. In some cases, the principal determines the election committees, and some schools even refuse to conduct an election at the first place [1].

The school committees bring a powerful linkage between the school and the surrounding community. Bridging the school and the community could effectively address the issues of education and increase supports for school management. The collaboration between school and community could improve education quality. The representation of village council members in the school committees, for instance, could solve problematic issues such as building school facilities and infrastructure, hiring contract teachers, providing a conflict resolution between schools in the community, and promoting religious and social activities at school [1].

School-Community Development

In the present days, schools are supposedly able to make students succeed in a competitive global world and economy in meeting the demands of the 21st century. For that reason, a good collaboration between school and community is urgently needed to determine the future of students' needs and community wellbeing [13]. The role of schools in community development is aligned with community-building efforts. It means that improving school education may improve the community as well. Academic and community improvement goals should be mutually prioritized to build a strong linkage between these two institutions. Even though building school-

community collaboration is not a new idea, it needs to be maintained and sustained in order to achieve the goal of a highly valued education institution [14] [15] [16].

The efforts of involving parents and community in school activities are beneficial to student academic achievement [17] [18] [19]. However, some researchers also reported that different values and interests of parents and community could also be great barriers in improving student academic performance [20]. For that reason, a clear vision of a mutually beneficial, collaborative school-community building process is essential. The mutual collaboration between school and community has a direct reflection on the success of both parties. It can be said that a 'greater community' – who share common core values of their young people potential future - lies in a good relationship with its surrounding schools [21].

The mutual collaboration between school and community is essential to the well being of all parties, including schools, students, families, and communities. At the same time, school as an educational institution needs to support its community in a context of learning so that the quality of life in that particular community could be improved. This mutual collaboration could be described as a well-functioning school in which strengthening the local identity could increase a social integration of community and neighbourhoods. In this sense, schools are considered as centres of community activities to nurture public participation and affairs, spaces for social and community events, and symbols of community identity and autonomy [13].

On top of that, schools also provide significant economic benefits for surrounding communities. It becomes the principal sources of local employment supporting small-scale businesses [14]. A study on social and economic benefits of schools found that there are some advantages communities with schools have, such as higher professional values and greater entrepreneurial activities [22].

Future School-Community Collaboration

Preparing effective school-community collaboration is critically important. If it is left unattended, the school will fail to prepare a bright future for the students, and the community will lose their power of valuable resources. A study on the community's assets suggested that the role of schooling is seldom viewed as community development. It is argued that the more professionalized and centralized the schools, the more distance they keep from local communities. As a result, it weakens essential links between education, experience, and real-life works. This eventually leads to schools losing their power as valuable community resources. Without valuable contributions of local schools, communities and

neighbourhoods are struggling to revitalize their economy [23].

Based on the scenario as mentioned earlier, the future success of both school and community collaboration depends on 'building collaborative partnerships' and 'going the path of education together' strategies. This is important to prepare the standards and future collaboration policies between the school and the community. As suggested by *The Educational Leadership Policy Standards: The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) 2008*, strong school leadership and collaboration has six standards to promote the success of every student at school. They include significant efforts to (1) set a shared vision for learning; (2) develop school cultures and instructional programs that are conducive to student and staff professional growth; (3) ensure effective management of school organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (4) collaborate with faculty and community members, respond to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilize community resources; (5) act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner, and; (6) understand, respond to, and influence the political, social, legal, and cultural context [24].

These educational leadership policy standards act as basic guidance to shape and influence school and community's traits, goals, and responsibilities. The main role of education is to prepare future leaders who understand the foundations of community development and educational leadership. The first standard indicates that schools should gain the inputs and continues supports of community leaders in setting and sharing the vision for student learning. The second standard signifies that school leaders should encourage the staff to become actively involved in the community as a means of professional development.

Furthermore, the third standard suggests that schools should collaborate with community organizations to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all students. The fourth standard advocates that school leaders should identify community development needs that mutually accomplish the goals of the school and community. The fifth standard encourages school leaders to demonstrate integrity and fairness in collaborative community development activities, especially involving parents and multiple community organizations. Lastly, the sixth standard urges school leaders to understand the local cultures that can influence positive school-community collaboration [13].

Finally, one of the challenges for schools in the 21st century is building good cooperation between educational institutions and community entities. A study on rural school areas, for instance, emphasizes this point to both public education and

community leaders. A community needs to employ the right strategy to succeed and meet the demands of the 21st century. The most significant strategy to prosper in the new millennium is through good collaboration among schools, communities, local governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [25].

CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanation, this article concludes that a successful school shares responsibility and takes collaborative actions with surrounding communities. This is a necessary condition to enhance the future success of students in which the school fosters a sense of learning among community and community nurtures a sense of place among students.

Cultivating collaborative and meaningful school-community development is a trademark of meeting the challenges in the 21st century. The significance of collaboration is beyond achieving the academic success of students. The focus must be extended to the social and economic development of the blended community that is mutually beneficial. Both education and community institutions are critical ingredients of success in the 21st century.

As most of the communities in the world, Indonesia also faces enormous challenges and changes in education. Thus, the school leaders must foster collaborative school-community development to improve the quality of education that will ultimately improve community development.

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